

March 4, 1970

Professor Hans Freudenthal
Department of Pure and Applied Mathematics
Utrecht University
Utrecht, The Netherlands

Dear Professor Freudenthal,

Although I am the furthest thing from a mathematician I have shared certain interests with you and in particular found your book "Lincos" quite fascinating.

I am writing at the moment simply from just having discovered a reference to a paper by Hogben of which I had not previously been aware and which is attached here and under.

I have also somewhere seen the remark that the transmission of a dimensionless number like the fine-structure constant to whatever precision we know it today would convey a great deal of information about the present status of our civilization, possibly including some of its neoplastic exuberances. If you happened to recall the source of this attribution I would be grateful to you for it.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

P. S. I am very well aware that "Lincos" is really not at all about interstellar communication. I wonder if you have thought about the minimum conditions for proving the correctness of a specific interpretation of works in a lost language like Etruscan or Mayan accent a specific dictionary. This, of course, leaves one with little more than internal inconsistency as a criterion. To turn this viewpoint inside out could one not argue that the transmission of the English text of your book would provide sufficient information that the correct induction would necessarily be arrived at by any moderately (I almost said sufficiently) skilled and diligent civilization.

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